An autumn flood of Kennedy books

By Paul Colford
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Michael Korda, the novelist and editor-in-chief of Simon & Schuster, says that if Shakespeare had had a good biography of the Kennedys, he would have written a play about them in 48 hours. "The family's story is the one Shakespearean and Greek tragedy that we've had in 200 years of American history," he adds. "It has everything – greed, murder, dynasty and power."

It may be no wonder then that a tall wave of new books about members of the Massachusetts clan, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination, includes no less than three from Simon & Schuster and its Fireside paperback division.

S & S has scheduled an October release of "President Kennedy: Profile of Power," columnist Richard Reeves' review of the Kennedy administration. The book is said to present an especially detailed chronology of JFK's thousand days in office, offering in some cases a minute-by-minute chronology of his decision making.

Among the books about the assassination will be Bob Callahan's "Who Killed JFK?" (Fireside), a guide to 20 major conspiracy theories floated since the killing in Dallas.

In "Case Closed," scheduled for September, author Gerald L. Posner will make the case that Lee Harvey Oswald was a lone gunman. In an unusual letter to book-review editors, Random House publisher Harold M. Evans praises Posner and says that he "answers every reasonable doubt ... by an astonishing accumulation of coherent evidence on the character and actions of Oswald, and by new evidence ... so that the effect is quite overwhelming."

In disagreeing with Posner, "The Killing of a President," an ambitious $30 volume from Viking Studio with an announced print run of 100,000 copies, seems sure to cause a stir of its own. The book by Robert J. Groden, a former photo consultant to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, will lay out undoctored transcripts of witness interviews and several hundred photographs, including ghastly shots taken at the president's autopsy and pictures that

The 30th anniversary of JFK's assassination sparks new interest.

support allegations of a murder conspiracy and cover-up. The November release will present Jacqueline Kennedy's unedited testimony before the Warren Commission in which she chillingly recalled that the shots that hit her husband had come from the front as well as behind. "I was trying to hold his hair on," she said, "and his skull on."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who has suffered unflattering media attention through the years, now may enjoy something of a reprieve in print. In "Chappaquiddick: The Real Story," published in June by St. Martin's Press, lawyer James Lange and co-author Katherine DeWitt Jr. dismiss the drunk-as-a-skunk and cover-up theories long associated with the 1969 incident that resulted in the death of Mary Jo Kopechne. Instead, they argue that Kennedy was guilty of panic and poor judgment.

In addition, for all the controversy set off by Simon & Schuster's original note in Joe McGinniss' "The Last Brother" – it stated that some thoughts and dialogue "were created by the author," based on research – an excerpt circulated among retailers indicates that the 640-page book will offer a sympathetic portrait. Subtitled "The Rise and Fall of Teddy Kennedy" and scheduled for October (although an earlier release is expected), the finished book will replace the curious copyright note with an explanation from McGinniss about the technique he used in writing dialogue.

Curiously, the 25th anniversary of Robert F. Kennedy's slaying passed in June with minimal attention from publishers. Two exceptions: In the new "When I Think of Bobby" (HarperCollins), Washington columnist Warren Rogers affectionately remembers Kennedy the family man.

In the new "Heroes of My Time" (Walker), retired New York Times reporter Harrison E. Salisbury chronicles how his own view of Robert Kennedy changed over two decades – the cold-blooded opportunist encountered in 1956 became a wise man ready to be a fine president.

Perhaps the surest sign that the Kennedys will continue to interest publishers for years to come is the release of books about the younger members of the clan, including Rep. Joseph Kennedy III, D-Mass., and NBC news anchor Maria Shriver.

In November, Thunder's Mouth Press plans a 50,000-copy printing of "The Kennedys: The Third Generation" by Ted Schwarz and Barbara Gibson, a former secretary to matriarch Rose Kennedy.

Also in November, "Prince Charming: The John F. Kennedy Jr. Story" will be published by Dutton. The author, Wendy Leigh, last sized up Kennedy's cousin-in-law, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in a tell-all biography that incurred the actor's wrath. Although Dutton is keeping quiet about "Prince Charming," the publisher's fall catalogue says that Leigh has tapped "hitherto unreleased government files and previously unavailable material from the Kennedy Library" in crafting a portrait of "the most desirable man of our time." And seeking to exploit interest in JFK Jr. as hunk, Dutton has settled on a wordless book cover that will show only the heartthrob.

Jerry,
Here's something Jim sent.
Ron